

VZCZCXRO6193  
RR RUEHAT RUEHBW  
DE RUEHGV #0392/01 1501701  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 291701Z MAY 08  
FM USMISSION GENEVA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6513  
INFO RUEHZJ/HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2734

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 GENEVA 000392

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR IO/RHS, DRL/MLGA, L/HRR

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [UNHRC](#) [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [FAO](#)

SUBJECT: HRC SPECIAL SESSION ON FOOD

REF: STATE 054658

¶1. SUMMARY: The Human Rights Council (HRC) special session on the right to food, called by more than 30 countries, took place on May 23. Per reftel, USDel attended as notetaker only. The session featured interventions from many countries, as well as from international organizations and other UN entities. All speakers agreed that attention to the human rights element of the current food crisis was essential to a proper response, but differed on the degree to which they thought the HRC could properly diagnose the problem. Some insisted that political motivation behind economic policies was clearly to blame, while others felt a thorough analysis of the complex worldwide issue required more technical expertise than the HRC possessed. After modification to Cuba's original text (reducing the obligations created for other UN bodies), the resolution, with 78 co-sponsors from all regions, passed by consensus. END SUMMARY.

¶2. High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour opened the HRC 7th Special Session, saying that the HRC was throwing a light on the human rights dimension of the global food crisis and expressing concern that the crisis could further entrench long-standing patterns of discrimination. The new Special Rapporteur (SR) on the Right to Food, Olivier de Schutter, said the causes of the food crisis were political; other international organizations were approaching the crisis as a humanitarian or macroeconomic problem, rather than as an issue of rights. In de Schutter's view, the right to food should shape national policies to better shield vulnerable populations from rising food prices.

¶3. In the end, 78 countries cosponsored the resolution. European Union (EU) delegations that had participated in negotiations on the draft resolution widely agreed that Cuba had been even-handed and dogged in its pursuit of cross-regional consensus; while Cuba did not allow many of the edits proposed by the Western European and Other Group (WEOG), it also rejected the African Group (AG) push to assign blame more specifically for the food situation. The EU did not cosponsor as a bloc; in their interventions, holdouts like Sweden, Denmark, and Germany cited worries that by addressing the causes of the crisis, the HRC overstepped the bounds of its expertise. Canada regretted the "preponderant emphasis on international cooperation and assistance over national obligations" in its explanation of the vote but went on to say that, given the scale of the problem, it would not block consensus.

¶4. USDel deployed reftel talking points when asked informally by several delegations (e.g., Slovenia, Canada, UK, Mexico, Sweden, Australia, and Egypt) about why our seat was empty. Representatives of several of those delegations expressed surprise that the US did not speak on a topic on which it clearly enjoyed the high ground in terms of aid and attention.

¶5. Common themes in country statements fell into two general

categories: on one hand, the deleterious effects of biofuel production, agricultural subsidies and unequal global wealth distribution and, on the other, the responsibility of individual governments to provide for their populations. Cuba stated that the unjust distribution of wealth worldwide was the real cause of the crisis. Egypt for the AG focused on structural problems, including the inadequacy of the World Trade Organization (WTO), biofuel production, and agricultural subsidies. India and South Africa also pointed to biofuels and rising oil prices. Pakistan for the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) emphasized underlying structural failings and the need for a sustainable solution. Brazil said food subsidies were indeed a problem, but argued that blaming biofuel production was shortsighted.

¶16. Slovenia for the EU noted the role of other international organizations in addressing the food crisis and mentioned that the HRC was not the proper venue to address all aspects of the problem. Canada's remarks shifted the focus to governments' responsibility to their own citizens and also called on all donors to allow the food aid they donate to be purchased locally (to "untie" the aid), a practice that Canada had just carried out. The Holy See pointed to issues of financial and logistical access and called for a renewed commitment to African agriculture and for the balance of land use for food and other purposes to be governed by the common good, rather than relying exclusively on market forces. There were multiple calls for the international community to move beyond emergency stop-gap measures to address the underlying long-term causes.

¶17. In a number of interventions, international organizations

GENEVA 00000392 002 OF 002

lauded the HRC for highlighting the human rights aspect of the crisis and highlighted several themes. The World Food Program, the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, and the Food and Agricultural Organization argued that the question of cause was a complex technical one, but that there was a human element, and expressed hope that the special session would help governments better to distribute food to their populations. The International Monetary Fund noted its technical advisory role in the debate. The World Bank said that imposing export bans was not the proper response to food shortage; Ukraine was lauded for lifting its food ban and Thailand drew praise for continuing to export rice.

¶18. Post has sent the final resolution by email to IO on May

¶28. That resolution "invites" the FAO to invite SR de Schutter to its June Rome meeting and otherwise urges countries to redouble their coordinated efforts to supply adequate food to all regions.

TICHENOR